


TRICARE Fundamentals Course

Module 15


Customer Service

Participant Guide

Module Objectives




Module Objectives




- Identify words, attitudes, and actions that create a side-by-side approach in solving customer problems.
- Identify appropriate wording of apologies.
- Identify appropriate responses for handling difficult customer behaviors.

Customer Service

- The customer is not always right...but the customer is always the customer:
 - This fundamental attitude is the beginning of success in customer service at any level, in any industry.
 - The goal is a positive outcome to every interaction—every communication.



Customer Service



Excellent customer service is the ability of an organization to constantly and consistently exceed the customer's expectations.

Solving Customer Problems

- Customer frustrations generally fall into one of the following categories:
 - Unmet service expectations
 - Delays or cancellations
 - Incorrect or inadequate information
 - Mistakes
 - Rude or insensitive treatment

Possible reasons why customers may get upset

- They are tired, stressed, or hungry
- No one has listened to them
- They were told one thing by one person and something different by another person
- Someone gave them wrong or incomplete information
- They think someone purposely lied to them
- Someone argued with them
- Someone treated them rudely
- Someone did not give them the attention they deserved
- They don't think anyone cares about their predicament
- Someone gave them a flippant reply
- They were left holding on the phone too long
- They feel embarrassed about making a mistake themselves

Side-by-Side Approach

- Never let a situation deteriorate into an “us-against-them” attitude when it comes to resolving customer problems.
- Use words and statements that show that you are on the customer's side.
 - It shows you see things from their perspective
 - Use “we,” “us,” and “let's”
 - For example:
 - “You have a really good point. I understand the confusion with what we told you earlier.”
 - “Please come with me, and let's try to find that information for you.”

- The side-by-side approach also refers to the physical position.
 - When facing a customer head on the dynamics of the situation tend to make the interaction confrontational because you are squaring off with each other.
 - Try to position your body so that you are shoulder to shoulder, or side by side with the upset customer.
 - Subtly you are showing your willingness to look at the situation from the customer's viewpoint.

Appropriate Mindset for Resolving Problems

- Sometimes service providers shrink from potentially hostile situations because they lack confidence in their own abilities to resolve customer problems
- Some service providers give the impression that they enjoy confrontation and welcome such opportunities to let the customer know what they can and can't get away with
- As a service provider you must be confident enough to represent the organization in tough situations, yet sensible enough to understand the value of customers and make quick decisions to keep them happy

Know Your Problem-Resolving Mindset

1. Describe each mindset by listing characteristics (words, attitudes, and actions) that illustrate each.

Passive and Fearful

Spontaneously Emotional

Defensive

Lecturing and Controlling

Reasoning and Logical

2. Label the following responses with the mindset that illustrates: passive and fearful (P&F), defensive (D), spontaneously emotional (SE), lecturing and controlling (L&C), and reasoning and logical (R&L).

_____ Well, I'm sorry, but I can't control the weather.

_____ You can't change your appointment on a whim like that without expecting to have to wait for us to reschedule.

_____ Stop shouting at me.

_____ I'm working as fast as I can.

_____ You must wait outside this yellow line.

_____ Can't you see I'm busy right now?


_____ We can't be responsible for watching anyone's personal belongings while they're in our facilities.

_____ Look, I'm sorry you had trouble. But there's no way we can predict some things. What do you expect us to do?


_____ You'll have to tell us the day before if you expect us to stay on top of such changes. Those kinds of changes at the last minute wreak havoc with our scheduling.

_____ So what do you want me to do about it now?

Four Steps in Solving Problems



Problem Resolution



- **Show concern**
- **Exchange information (ask and tell)**
- **Agree on alternatives**
- **Act, and handle the details**

- Show concern
 - Listen to customers and give them a chance to tell their story
 - If the customer continues to tell you repeatedly the details of a situation, chances are you have not expressed adequate concern
 - Leave no doubt in the customer's mind that you care about their situation
- Exchange information (ask and tell)
 - Before you dive into solving a customer's problem, make sure you understand the details
 - Repeat to the customer the important details to show that you have listened
 - Ask questions to probe for missing information you need to fully understand the situation
 - Provide the customer with necessary information or explanations so they fully understand the situation
- Agree on alternatives
 - Either ask your customers to suggest alternatives or offer your own
 - Don't assume your customer needs or wants more than they do
 - In some situations you may want to offer the customer alternatives to meet their needs

- Act, and handle the details
 - Once the customer has agreed on the best alternative, take action.
 - Handle all the details and make sure you have answered all the customer's questions about the action you're taking.
 - Make sure the customer understands what happens next.

Never, say never

- Never set a customer and yourself up for a disappointment by promising that something will never happen again.
 - Tell your customer of any precaution that you plan to take against future errors.
 - After you have handled a customer situation in a less-than-satisfactory way, discuss it with a coworker or supervisor and decide how you will handle the situation differently the next time.

Resolving Problems Quickly

1. Read the customer comments below that indicate an upset customer and a potentially escalating problem.
2. Now, create a situation of your own and be prepared to resolve this situation, following the four steps in solving problems listed on page 14-6.

Situation 1: “I was told the fee was \$75. Now you’re telling me it is \$85. You people think you can get away with anything when a person has to have help, no matter what.”

Situation 2: “I never bought that equipment. That was my brother. They billed everything to the wrong account. That’s happened before. Why can’t they get it straight?”

Situation 3: “I dropped my receipt somewhere and when I came back to get it, somebody had already tossed it away. It was nowhere to be found near the desk where I was waiting. Could you find someone to check for it in the garbage?”

Situation 4: “I have three accounts here, and I don’t think you should charge for my college-age son’s checking account. Other banks don’t do that. He never writes more than five or ten checks a month anyway. I just don’t understand your fee structure.”


Your situation:

Explaining Policies and Procedures Positively

- You should use policies and procedures as guidelines, not, never to be broken mandates.
 - However, there are some policies and procedures that cannot be changed
 - For example, legal requirements, government regulations, and safety standards
- Know which policies and procedures can be broken.
 - When you discover rules that seem unnecessary and unfriendly to customers, work on ideas for changing such policies and procedures and pass on your suggestions to your supervisor.
- With the never to be broken rules, learn how to explain them clearly and positively.
 - It irritates customers if you say, “we can’t do that because it’s against policy.”
 - Customers want and deserve clear explanations.
 - Let them know how the policies and procedures ensure better service for them and protect them in various situations.

Sincere, Effective Apologies

- When you make a mistake—either through carelessness or insensitivity—be willing to apologize and accept responsibility.
 - Remember that apologizing does not necessarily mean that the mistake was made by you.
 - An apology means that you are accepting responsibility for a situation and that you are sorry the situation has happened.
 - Even when the mistake is inadvertent or the situation involves something over which you have no control, offer an apology.



Sincere, Effective Apologies

- Show concern
- Empathize and show that you have listened
- Express regret
- Be specific, not global
- State the corrective action
- Reestablish rapport with a goodwill statement

- Show concern
 - “You must have really worried when you got that notice—I’m sorry for the mistake.”
- Empathize and show that you have listened.
 - “I know you wanted to come in before noon on Tuesday. This new date will mean a change in your schedule.”
- Express regret over the situation, action, behavior, or outcome
 - “I sure do regret that your provider did not have this current information on file.”
- Be specific, not global
 - “I did make the assumption that you wanted both appointments changed. That was my error.”
- State the corrective action you are taking or plan to take
 - “I can enter those changes in the computer now.”
- Reestablish rapport with a goodwill statement
 - “We appreciate your bringing the mistake to our attention.”

Turning Over a Customer Problem to a Supervisor

- Frontline people often feel frustrated when they present policies and procedures to customers and then hear a supervisor overturn their decision at the customer’s demand.
- Supervisors often feel frustrated when they’re set up and find themselves in a no win situation of having to support the frontline rep or the customer, but not both.
- The secret in teaming up effectively to resolve a problem situation is in the turnover wording.

Examples

- I’ll go ask the supervisor, but she’s not going to let you do that.
- My supervisor will have to approve that change.
- Here’s my supervisor—you’ll have to tell him about it.
- We can’t do that here. My supervisor will tell you the same thing.

Techniques for Coping with Difficult Customers

Adopt the exception, not the rule mindset

- Research shows that dishonest, difficult customers represent a very small percentage of the entire customer population.
 - However, some organizations fall into the trap of setting all their policies and procedures to catch or prevent such customers from taking advantage of them.
 - By doing that, these organizations let such rules get in the way of helping the majority of honest, agreeable customers.
- Every customer is an individual with their own mindset, personality, quirks, talents, and tantrums.
- It is up to you to read individuals correctly and then access your bag of tricks for coping with the behaviors that surface when you meet these people.
- Don't let customers bait and hook you into their own behavior patterns.

Passive, unresponsive, or nonvocal

- Ask open-ended questions to gather information.
- Ask closed questions to gain agreement.
- Comment on body language ("You're frowning. Are you distressed?") to get the problem in the open so you can deal with it.
- Be Direct, "Are you upset about something?"

Know-it all

- Collect all the data to verify the situation.
- Respect and use their knowledge.
- Lead them to re-examine their own information, assumptions, questions, and conclusions.
- Express an "alternative" approach and suggest they "think it over" and get back to you.

Irate

- Allow them to ventilate their emotions, and listen actively.
- State your wish to be a problem-solving partner.
- Dig for the real issue, not the symptom.
- Accept their views and then state your own in a matter-of-fact tone.
- Use closed questions to manage the conversation.
- Use the broken-record (repeat, repeat) technique.

Dishonest

- Assume honesty.
- Ask open-ended questions to gather information.
- State the alternatives open to the customer.
- Do not accuse the customer of dishonesty.
- Keep records of claims/actions that you consider dishonest and refer to them in making decisions on subsequent encounters.

Pseudo-helpless

- Reassure and give confidence.
- Give instructions and a pep talk.
- Mention other resources such as people or written references.
- Help them to be specific. (Example: “What exactly is it that you don’t understand?” “Which step is difficult?”)
- Start the process for them.
- Compliment on things well done.

Demanding

- Listen empathetically.
- Ask: “What do you think would be fair in this situation?”
- State: “I think X would be fair because...”
- Use the broken-record (repeat, repeat) technique.

Complainer

- Suggest that they offer a specific improvement or change.
- Offer to take action for them and pass on their complaint.
- Give credit for what they have “suffered.”
- Accept what they say, neither agreeing nor disagreeing.

Confused

- Repeat your directions.
- Ask them to verify what they have heard you say.
- Ask if someone nearby can assist/help them.
- Give them specific examples or illustrations.
- Start the process for them.

Summary



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- Identify appropriate wording of apologies.
- Identify appropriate responses for handling difficult customer behaviors.